

Romanian nuns bring life back to St. Andrew

By Penny Blaker Mitchell

Tribune-Star Columnist AUG 15 1987

The buildings are washed with new paint that sparkles in the August sunshine. Begonias, petunias and lillies line the paths between the church and the house. And the sun glistens against the blue and green stained-glass windows.

The new beauty of the once-abandoned church and residence at 1313 N. 25th St. is a reflection of the dedication of Mothers Benedicta, Apolinaria and Gabriella, all of whom have been living in Terre Haute a mere six months.

The three women, formerly of Romania, have reopened St. Andrew Rumanian Orthodox Church. Their ultimate mission is to start a monastery, but for now their work leans toward that of missionaries.

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, Mother Benedicta, the abbess, was sewing vestments. In the kitchen, Mother Apolinaria baked bread before going to

the garden in the back yard to harvest tomatoes and green peppers. Mother Gabriella explained their work.

The three women came to Terre Haute in February. Mother Benedicta extends her hands toward the ceiling and tells of the condition of the house and the church when they first visited the city.

"The ceilings were falling . . . When we returned, it was like this," she says, gesturing toward the snow-white walls, the blue drapes at the windows, the fluorescent lights above the long sewing table.

"The people here are very good. The people . . . the people are very pious. Dedicated . . ."

Mother Benedicta and Mother Gabriella have been in the United States nine years; Mother Apolinaria has been in this country seven years. All three served at the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration in Ellwood City, Pa., before coming to Terre Haute.

"The bishop asked if we would come

and keep this church open," Mother Gabriella says. "We also are interested in having a monastery as soon as we find the proper place. Hopefully, a place in the country, quiet and on a larger piece of land.

"A monastery is a spiritual oasis," she explains. "A retreat. A place to come for prayer, for spiritual refreshment and nourishment.

"Orthodox monasteries are known for their hospitality. Everyone is welcome to come and to participate in the daily schedules, the meals and in the work," she smiles.

The three women cling to a simple life. They style and sew ritual vestments for priests and deacons within the Orthodox Church. They bake bread and tend their garden. And they pray.

"Orthodox monasteries are different," Mother Gabriella said in her gentle voice. "We are not social workers or school teachers. We do not have orders. We wear long black habits. And we always work

within the monastery."

Sister Gabriella says people in the community seem to be glad the church is open again. While attendance at the daily services at 7 a.m., 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. is small, former parishioners, their relatives and new residents of the area are attending.

"I think we are starting to see a mission already," she says. "St. Andrew's is an old church and the community is here . . . The church is the mystical body of Christ. The material and spiritual parts together form the church. If the building is falling apart, you know the spiritual part is gone. It is sad to see a church go to ruin . . ."

St. Andrew Church was rescued from ruin by the three nuns and by volunteers from St. George Orthodox Church who rolled up their sleeves and painted, cleaned and repaired the structures.

Mother Gabriella, who will be 32 in October, has been a nun nearly 14 years. After she graduated from high school, a nun she knew asked her if she would be interested in joining a monastery.

"Something clicked," she says softly. "But Romania is a communist country and only women older than 50 were allowed to join monasteries at the time . . . But the nun said that other girls were joining and that I could try.

"I guess it was in my heart. I just didn't know it. God calls us in strange ways at the appropriate times. I felt in my heart it was what I wanted to do."

Mother Benedicta, 69, first entered the monastery when she was 10. At that time, families in Romania were large and children often were selected to enter monasteries. When they matured they were allowed to leave, but most stayed.

Mother Gabriella notes that people sometimes believe that nuns who live in monasteries are running away from life and from the world.

"That is not so," she says. "Because our life is simple, we are able to stand back and look at the stage — the world. We get the whole vision. We see what work needs to be done. We are aside from the world and very much a part of the world."

Vigo County Public Library

REFERENCE
DO NOT CIRCULATE

Community Affairs File

Archbishop Valerian D. Trifa To Give Service At St. Andrew's

The Most Rev. Valerian D. Trifa, Archbishop of Detroit and All Michigan, will visit the congregation of St. Andrew's Romanian Orthodox Church this weekend.

Archbishop Trifa, who has jurisdiction over all Romanian Orthodox churches in the U.S. and Canada, will be at the church both Saturday evening and for the Divine Liturgy at 10:15 a.m. Sunday.

+ + +

A native of Romania, Archbishop Trifa was educated in his homeland and in Germany, where he studied theology and philosophy. Before coming to this country he was engaged in newspaper work for religious publications in Romania and taught at a Roman Catholic missionary college in Italy for five years. In addition to Romanian, the Archbishop speaks English, Italian, German and French.

Archbishop Trifa has led the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America since 1952. He is a member of the American Orthodox Council of Bishops, National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. and Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.

A reception in the Archbishop's honor will be conducted at 6 p.m. in the church basement following the Great Vespers service. The Rev. George Rados, pastor of St. George's Orthodox Church, will join the



THE MOST REV. VALERIAN
D. TRIFA

congregation for Saturday's activities.

+ + +

Archbishop Trifa will assist with the Divine Liturgy Sunday

and officiate at the installation of the Rev. John Fleser as pastor of St. Andrew's parish.

Father Fleser has also announced the anonymous donation of 13 icons depicting the major feasts of the Orthodox Church. The icons, that are photographic reproductions mounted on wood, measure 10 inches by 12 inches. They will be displayed in the church Sunday for persons wanting to see them.

Father Fleser said the icons are a welcome addition to the church.

T.H. Churches Old World Customs Still Observed at St. Andrew's

Editor's note — This is the second of two articles on Old World customs observed in Terre Haute. The first was on St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church.

By NIKI LEE MAHONEY
Tribune Staff Writer

St. Andrew's Eastern Orthodox Church, 1311 N. 25th St., like St. George's, perpetuates the Old World customs and traditions in the church services and the way it celebrates such church-related events as baptism, marriage and death.

Although they have been without a parish priest for quite a few months, the congregation of St. Andrew's has continued to hold services and celebrations whenever possible.

St. Andrew's is basically Romanian, whereas St. George's is principally of Greek and Arabic descent. The services of both, being Orthodox, are very similar. As Father George Rados of St. George's explained, the only main difference is language.

However, Father John Fleser, who came to St. Andrew's last week, explained that Romanian is no longer widely used in the church. "It's difficult to pray in a language you don't speak," he said. Even books of the faith are being translated into English.

Also, people from the Old

Country and their descendants no longer live in settlements. They are scattered throughout cities, which helps erode the observance of their customs.

As is the case with St. George's, St. Andrew's holds special services on specified Sundays for the 12 apostles, changes in the ritual for each. A special meal is served on these days with blessed bread. Romanian Pig in the Blanket may also be served during special occasions.

Observance of Old Country customs and celebrations depends on members of the clergy and congregation. Transmission of revelations and religious beliefs depends on both what is written down and what has been passed through the centuries by word of mouth.

"Not all that the apostles preached could be written down," Father Fleser explained. Some examples of the oral teachings are emersion three times at baptism, making the sign of the cross and the fact that Eastern Orthodox followers do not kneel.

The Feast of the Mother of God, Theotokos, has all been passed on orally.

"Christ has given us the church, revealed the truth, so we don't change the church," Father Fleser said. "It is our responsibility as clergymen to maintain the traditions, canons

and dogmas, and to explain them to the people."

Members of the clergy of the Orthodox Church have certain freedoms, but, according to Father Fleser, they can't change the teachings of Christ or they commit heresy.

The Orthodox church differs from the Protestant in many ways, of course. One difference Father Fleser pointed out was their use of icons, which are representations or pictures of sacred personages, themselves considered sacred.

"Icons are difficult for Protestants to understand," he said. They were banished during the Protestant Reformation. The pastor is in the process of collecting new icons for his church.

Orthodoxy is also different from Catholicism. For one thing the clergy can marry and have children, as is the case with both Father Rados and Father Fleser.

The Great Schism of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church was made final in 1054. One of the bones of contention is the fact that the Bishop of Rome (or Pope) insists that he has primacy of jurisdiction over all churches, including the patriarchs of the East.

The Orthodox recognize the patriarch of Constantinople, but he isn't infallible, although he speaks the truth, Father Fleser said. The bishops of Orthodoxy are all considered to be on the same level.

Like the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church observes baptisms, wed-

dings and feast days as gala affairs.

"In the Old Country Christmas was celebrated for three days," said Michael Buzash, a St. Andrew's parishioner. The first day was for prayer and the service. During the other two days the younger people had celebrations and dances.

Originally from Indianapolis, Father Fleser received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. His degree in theology was completed a few weeks ago at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Tuckahoe, N.Y. In June he will receive his Bachelor of Divinity degree.

Father Fleser lives with his wife, Victoria, and his son, Christopher, next to the church at 1313 N. 25th St.

Of the church which he has recently taken over, Father Fleser says, "We're moving right along, and we hope to grow even further." Besides new icons, he plans to make other changes in the small but interesting church.

Summing up the beliefs and teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy, Father Fleser commented, "The internal man is important, not the external. A spiritual change is necessary, and one must love his neighbor and the truth."

A fog broom is a device that consists of vertical wood frames strung with nylon threads. This apparatus is moved through fog so that moisture clings to and runs down the threads.

T. H. CHURCHES

ST. ANDREW

4

T. H. TRIBUNE-STAR.

Sunday, Feb. 21, 1971



NEW PASTOR OF ST. ANDREW'S Eastern Orthodox Church, the Rev. John Fleser, blesses water during a Sunday service. The church had been without a pastor for quite a few months, and now the Rev. Fleser plans to help it grow and the congregation continue to observe the Orthodox faith, traditions and customs.

Strausburg Photo.

REFERENCE
DO NOT ORIGINATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS FILE

Half Century T.H. Churches At St. Andrew's T.H. Trib. 10/26/18. Church Sunday

In October, 1918, the Romanian Community organized the present St. Andrew's congregation and built on North 25th Street a church to serve, for a vast number of immigrants, as an orthodox temple of worship.

A majority of these new foreigners became loyal citizens of the new blessed country and were known as faithful leaders in St. Andrew's Community and Church. The names of George Ghindes, Jim Serban, George Oltean, George Sonca, Andy Baltesu, Nick Opris, just to mention few, could not be easily forgotten.

After 50 years of orthodox religious and civic life in St. Andrew's Community, the present members of the Church are making preparations to commemorate the activity of 50 years with prayers in church and a memorial service for deceased members and leaders who are with their souls before God.

For this important event came Father Coriolan Isacu, who was pastor of St. Andrew's Church over 20 years—from Minnesota, and he will preside Sunday at the Divine Liturgy and memorial service where the members and friends of St. Andrew's Church will join in prayers. Two other Eastern Orthodox churches will also respond, the St. Constantine and Hellene of Indianapolis and St. George of Terre Haute, their members are expected to attend the Divine Service and dinner.

At 1 p.m. Sunday, the members of St. Andrew's Ladies Sodality will serve a dinner composed of many varieties in the Hungarian Hall, North 22nd Street and Linden. Si Copra, the president of the Church, extends a cordial invitation to the many friends of St. Andrew's Church to join in the afternoon celebration.

VIGO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

REFERENCE
DO NOT CIRCULATE

Community Affairs File

Churches (W.V.)
St. Andrews

VICTORY GIVES NAME TO RUMANIAN CHURCH

New Terre Haute House of Wor-
ship Is Farthest West of 32 in
United States.

CHORCHES (wv) Nov 19-18
The Rev. Elie Pop of Indianapolis, who came to dedicate the new Rumanian Church, Twenty-fifth street and Fourth avenue, returned home yesterday. There are more than 400 members in the parish and the church, which is officially known as Biserica Roman Orthodox St. Andrieu, will be called the Victory Church in honor of the success of the United States and allied nations with whom Rumania has been associated in the great war.

The new church is the thirty-second dedicated by the Rumanians of the Orthodox Greek Church and Terre Haute is the farthest west the church is represented. Eight priests have charge of the 32 churches, all of which have been established within the last 15 years since the Rumanians began to come to America.

Church Is Attractive.

The Victory Church is an attractive frame structure built after designs popular with the organization. It is well equipped to serve the needs of the parish. George Ghindes is president of the congregation and was active in the movement that made possible the establishment of the permanent church in Terre Haute. The people of the congregation are proud of their achievement.

The Rev. Father Pop was accompanied to Terre Haute by his son, Sergeant Amos Pop, who is with a machine gun company at Camp Shelby. Sergeant Pop has been in service 14 months and is home on a short furlough. Father Pop was distressed yesterday by the published report that Elie Pop of Indianapolis was one of the speakers at a celebration of the Hungarian Club.

The similarity of the names prompted some to think that Father Pop also spoke at the Hungarian celebration. The publication of the name in connection with the Hungarian Club program was due to confusion in telephoning the report to the meeting.

ST ANDREW'S GREEK ORTHODOX RUMANIAN
8512 - 4th Ave